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(Washington, DC) *Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez made the following remarks today at a press conference on U.S. immigration law and same sex couples and families.*

From the outset of our fight for comprehensive immigration reform, I have been trying to highlight the needs of families. The underlying part of any comprehensive immigration bill is family unity and I am here today because I think we need to speak more clearly, more articulately, and more frequently that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and same-sex couples and their binational relationships, are part of families.

Our immigration system must reflect the reality of our economy and society, and how we treat same-sex couples and families is just one example. We should modernize our laws to facilitate legal immigration so that we keep families together and individuals do not have to twist themselves in knots to conform to our outdated laws.

Right now, too many same-sex, bi-national couples face an impossible choice: to live apart or to break the law to be with their partners, families, and children. That's not good for them and it is not good for the rest of us either. That's why I think the provisions of UAFA must be part of any comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Remember a few weeks ago, that little girl who whispered to Michelle Obama her fear that President Obama's government might come one day to take her mommy away? That little 7-year-old is why we are fighting for immigration reform. In that brief, 20-second exchange, that Maryland second-grader made it crystal clear what is wrong with our immigration mess.

Unfortunately, her plight is all too common. We need ways for immigrants like her mother to enter the U.S. legally in the first place. We need to make legal immigration a realistic alternative for the people who feel the only way for them to come and work in America is to walk across the desert of Arizona or pay a smuggler to get them here. We need a way for undocumented immigrants like the mother of that Maryland girl to come forward, pay a fine, go through a process including criminal background checks, and get legal as a condition of staying and working in this country.

And I am here to say that as far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter to me whether that little girl has one mommy or two mommies. It's none of my business; it is none of the government's business, and it should not make a difference when it comes to our immigration policies.

On a more political note, I am confident that we can pass immigration reform that includes the provisions of UAFA this year. Including UAFA makes the tent that much bigger and makes the coalition that much stronger.

The goal must be to have an immigration system that keeps families together, enhances America's security, strengthens the economy, and is true to the core values of this nation that guarantees freedom and protects the basic human and civil rights of every individual. In order to get there, we need comprehensive immigration reform and we need UAFA and together – working as a team – we can make that goal a reality.

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